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Review of *Confessions of a Maddog: A Romp through the High-Flying Texas Music and Literary Era of the Fifties to the Seventies*
by Jay Dunston Milner

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Confessions of a Maddog: A Romp through the High-Flying Texas Music and Literary Era of the Fifties to the Seventies. By Jay Dunston Milner. Foreword by Larry L. King. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1998. Photographs, index. xv + 248 pp. \$29.95.

The title *Confessions of a Maddog* carries a reference that most readers will not recognize: the "Maddogs" were an assortment of Texas writers and musicians, rowdy "good-old-boys" (and a few girls), who in the 1960s created a social circle—Maddogs, Inc.—complete with official membership cards and a slogan. Milner's book is part autobiography, but mostly a memoir/reminiscence of a particular time and group of people. Billie Lee Brammer, Larry L. King, Bud Shrake, Dan Jenkins, Peter Gent, Gary Cartwright, and Milner himself led the somewhat motley crew. Musician Jerry Jeff Walker was a regular participant. More famous individuals, including Willie Nelson, Larry McMurtry, and Anne Richards, had brief or peripheral roles.

The core members of this latter-day "Wild Bunch" were would-be novelists who made a living through journalism, especially sports journalism. All had some success as writers,

although none became especially famous. Most lived in Fort Worth or Dallas, but Austin played an important role in the life of the group. Some were affiliated with the *Texas Observer* and liberal politics. All shared anti-establishment attitudes and a serious commitment to writing, music, and partying, not necessarily in that order. Their lifestyles blended about equal parts of Hunter Thompson "gonzo" journalism, Ken Kesey "Merry Pranksterism," and country music "outlaw" traditions. "Fear and Loathing in Texas" would have made an apt alternative title.

Milner and his friends lived fast and hard. Nearly all had drug and alcohol problems, multiple marriages, and various other difficulties. *Confessions* is more celebration than regret, but there often doesn't seem to be much fun, let alone real happiness, behind the incessant and frantic partying.

The Maddogs were a Texas phenomenon, a transition between the great Texas regionalists of the 1930s and 1940s—J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb—and the outpouring of Texas and western regional writing of the past two decades. But it was the partying, not regional interests, that defined the Maddogs. Despite a reputation as professional Texans, many eventually left the state. While segments of this book deal with other aspects of Milner's life—growing up in West Texas, working as an editor for Hodding Carter in Mississippi during the 1950s, his career in teaching and journalism, recovering from depression—these are secondary themes. Readers interested in the Lone Star State, "outlaw country music," or 1960s literature and journalism should find this an absorbing and informative book. For most others it portrays a distinctly minor and unfamiliar cast of characters. "Romp" is an appropriate subtitle descriptor: *Confessions* is a light-hearted, casual, lively read. But its scope and importance do not extend far beyond the borders of Texas.

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